

Message Text

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PAGE 01 DAMASC 04027 161720Z

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /001 W

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4883

S E C R E T DAMASCUS 4027

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FOR SECRETARY FROM AMBASSADOR

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SY, US

SUBJECT: OCTOBER 16 MEETING WITH ASAD

REF: A. STATE 239609; B. DAMASCUS 3898

1. HAD TWO-HOUR MEETING WITH ASAD THIS AFTERNOON
PRIMARILY IN CONNECTION INSTRUCTIONS TO OPEN DIALOG
WITH SYRIA ON LEBANESE SITUATION. I AM SEEING KHADDAM
TONIGHT ON SAME SUBJECT. (IT WAS NOT POSSIBLE TO
ARRANGE MEETING WITH KHADDAM EITHER PRIOR TO OR CONCURRENT
WITH ASAD SESSION.) WILL REPORT DETAILS BOTH MEETINGS BY SEPTTEL.

2. IN BRIEF ASAD APPEARED HAPPY WITH IDEA OF CONDUCTING
THIS DIALOG. HIS RESPONSES CONTAINED NOTHING SURPRISING.
HE PROBED FOR BASIS OUR ESTIMATE THAT ISRAEL WOULD PERCEIVE
INTERVENTION OF FOREIGN MILITARY FORCES IN LEBANON AS SO
THREATENING THAT THEY WOULD PROCEED TO INTERVENE WHATEVER WE
SAID. ASAD ASKED IF THIS WAS OUR CONCLUSION AFTER CONSULTATIONS
WITH ISRAELIS. I ASSURED HIM IT WAS SIMPLY MATTER OF OUR INDE-
PENDENT BEST JUDGMENT. HIS COMMENT ON THIS QUESTION WAS PREDICTABLY
MILITANT, BUT LARGELY AN ALMOST RITUALISTIC AFFIRMATION
OF ARAB UNITY. HE ENDED ON CALM NOTE THAT "IN ANY EVENT
UP TO NOW LEBANESE HAVE NOT ASKED US TO SEND IN OUR
FORCES."

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3. AT END OF MEETING SAID HE WOULD ANSWER YOUR

LETTER SHORTLY ABOUT PRESIDENT FORD'S PROPOSAL OF NOVEMBER 17-18 MEETING. NOTED THAT SITUATION WAS NOW DIFFERENT THAN IT HAD BEEN PRIOR TO SIGNING SINAI AGREEMENT. ON ONE HAND HE RECOGNIZED MEETING WOULD BE DESIRABLE BUT ON OTHER HAND SINAI ACCORD HAD CREATED CERTAIN "ADVERSE FACTORS." I SAID THAT IN REACHING HIS DECISION ON THE MEETING I HOPED HE WOULD BEAR TWO THINGS IN MIND. FIRST, HE SHOULD NOT BELIEVE FACILE ASSUMPTIONS BY JOURNALISTS THAT US MIDDLE EAST POLICY, AND PARTICULARLY WHITE HOUSE ACTIVITY THEREON, WAS ALREADY OR WOULD SOON BE FROZEN BY ADVENT OF OUR PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN. SECONDLY, PRESIDENT FORD WAS TOTALLY SINCERE IN AFFIRMING HE WOULD NOT TOLERATE CONTINUED STALEMATE IN AREA. SECRETARY HAD SAID WE HAD CERTAIN INTANGIBLES WE WOULD LIKE TO DESCRIBE IN SUCH MEETING. IF MEETING TOOK PLACE, ASAD WOULD FIND PRESIDENT FORD LISTENING INTENTLY TO ANY IDEAS HE, ASAD, MIGHT PRESENT.

4. ASAD REMARKED THAT MEETING COULD BE MISINTERPRETED BY OBSERVERS AS INDICATING NEW TREND IN SYRIAN POLICY. REPLIED THAT GENERAL DE GAULLE HAD FELT HE COULD MEET WITH AMERICAN LEADERS WITHOUT COMPROMISING HIS INTEGRITY AND I PRESUMED THAT CHAIRMAN BREZHNEV FELT SAME WAY. ASAD LAUGHED AND SAID HE WOULD LET YOU KNOW HIS ANSWER IN NEXT FEW DAYS.

5. PRESIDENT SPOKE WARMLY OF PRESIDENT FORD AND SENDS YOU HIS VERY BEST REGARDS, ASKING I REMIND YOU THAT HE WOULD ALWAYS SEPARATE POLICY FROM FRIENDSHIPS.
MURPHY

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: FOREIGN RELATIONS, DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS, NEGOTIATIONS, CAT-C
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 16 OCT 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: greeneet
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975DAMASC04027
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: X1
Errors: N/A
Film Number: P850104-1641
From: DAMASCUS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19751048/aaaabqpl.tel
Line Count: 92
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NODS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: NODIS
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: NODIS
Reference: 75 STATE 239609, 75 DAMASCUS 3898
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: greeneet
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 20 AUG 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <20 AUG 2003 by ElyME>; APPROVED <05 DEC 2003 by greeneet>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: OCTOBER 16 MEETING WITH ASAD
TAGS: PFOR, PEPR, XF, SY, US, LE, (ASAD, HAFIZ)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006